

Message Text

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NODIS

FOR ASSISTANT SECRETARY HARTMAN

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: CVIS

SUBJECT: VISAS FOR ITALIAN COMMUNIST PARTY OFFICIALS;
POSSIBLE BERLINGUER VISIT TO U.S.

REF: ROME 11473

1. WHETHER DELIBERATE OR NOT, THE KIND IF ARTICLE REPORTED REFTEL IS LAYING THE GROUNDWORK FOR A PUBLIC ISSUE OVER VISAS FOR COMMUNIST PART (PCI) OFFICIALS. WE ANTICIPATE THAT WE WILL IN A FEW WEEKS RECEIVE VISAS REQUESTS FOR AT LEAST THE FOLLOWING: (1) SERGIO SEGRE, CHIEF OF THE FOREIGN AFFAIRS SECTION OF THE CENTRAL COMMITTEE OF THE PCI, TO ATTEND A SEMINAR ON ITALY SPONSORED BY THE COUNCIL ON FOREIGN RELATIONS AND THE ITALIAN INSTITUTE OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS; (2) A RENEWAL OF THE HARVARD/YALE INVITATION TO GIORGIO NAPOLITANO, A MEMBER OF THE PCI SECRETARIAT, TO GIVE LECTURES AND PARTICIPATE IN SEMINARS; AND (3) A POSSIBLE ITALIAN PARLIAMENTARY VISIT FOR WHICH THE PCI WOULD PROBABLY PROPOSE SEGRE AND PCI SENATOR CALAMANDREI. IN ADDITION, PCI SECRETARY BERLINGUER, HAS INDICATED A DESIRE TO EXPLAIN HIS POSITION TO US OFFICIALS AND WE CAN EXPECT SOME "ARRANGED" INVITATION TO HIM WILL BE FORTHCOMING WHEN HE CONSIDERS THE TIME IS RIPE.

2. IN THE PAST, THE USG HAS REFUSED TO GRANT WAIVERS AND ISSUE VISAS TO PCI OFFICIALS INTERESTED IN TRAVELLING TO THE US FOR STRICTLY PARTY BUSINESS. WE HAVE ISSUED VISAS TO ITALIAN

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COMMUNISTS WHO ARE JOURNALISTS FOR SPECIFIC EVENTS. THIS WAS, AS

WE UNDERSTAND IT, CONSISTENT WITH THE GENERAL USG VISA POLICY TOWARD OFFICIALS OF EITHER RULING OR NON-RULING COMMUNIST PARTIES DESIRING TO ENTER THE US ON PURELY PARTY BUSINESS. ACCORDINGLY, LAST APRIL WE RECOMMENDED AGAINST A WAIVER FOR GIORGIO NAPOLITANO WHO WISHED TO VISIT THE US FOR THE PURPOSE OF LECTURING AT FOUR UNIVERSITIES. THE SUBSEQUENT PUBLICITY (NOT GREAT) OVER OUR FAILURE TO ACT ON NAPOLITANO'S APPLICATION SEEMED TO BE MORE INSPIRED BY THE AMERICAN SPONSORS THAN THE PCI ITSELF. HOWEVER, AS INDICATED ABOVE, OUR STANCE HAS NOT DETERRED THE PCI FROM RAISING THE ISSUE AGAIN WITH NEW VISA APPLICATIONS THIS YEAR.

3. SUCH VISA APPLICATIONS PRESENT US WITH A SERIOUS AND DIFFICULT DILEMMA. FOR ALMOST THIRTY YEARS WE HAVE BEEN MORE FIRM THAN MAY ANTI-COMMUNIST ITALIANS IN THE SENSE THAT THEY HAVE HAD SOME RELATIONSHIP WITH COMMUNISTS WHILE WE REMAINED ALOOF. THIS IS MORE TRUE TODAY THAN IT HAS EVER BEEN, AND TO CONTINUE THAT POLICY WILL ELICIT SOME CRITICISM (AND NO DEFENSE) FROM SOME DEMOCRATIC ELEMENTS IN ITALY. AT THE SAME TIME, CONTINUANCE OF THE POLICY IS OPPOSED BY MANY GROUPS IN THE US WHO SEE IT AS INCONSISTENT WITH THE AMERICAN LIBERAL TRADITION IN FAVOR OF FREE EXCHANGE OF IDEAS. WHILE WE ARE CONVINCED THAT THE US HAS NOTHING TO FEAR DOMESTICALLY FROM THE PRESENCE OF PCI OFFICIALS, WE ARE EQUALLY CONVINCED THAT THE PCI'S ENERGETIC PURSUIT OF ITS CAMPAIGN FOR VISAS IS NOT BASED ON A DESIRE TO VISIT THE US. INSTEAD, IT IS SEEKING THE BENEFITS IN DOMESTIC ITALIAN POLITICS THAT IT SEES FLOWING FROM A REVERSAL OF OUR 30 YEAR OLD POLICY. SUCH A REVERSAL WOULD BE PROPAGANDIZED (AS IT ALREADY IS IN ANTICIPATION) AS A USG ACCEPTANCE OF THE PCI AS A LEGITIMATE POLITICAL PARTY, WHICH IN THEIR INTERPRETATION WAS DEMONSTRATED BY THE RESULTS OF THE JUNE 15 ELECTIONS.

4. THERE IS NO QUESTION THAT ISSUANCE OF US VISAS FOR BERLINGUER AND OTHER PCI OFFICIALS WOULD BENEFIT THE PCI IN ITS DRIVE TOWARD DEMOCRATIC RESPECTABILITY IN THE EYES OF THE ITALIAN ELECTORATE. AS THE SECRETARY SAID TO MORO AND RUMOR IN HELSINKI, "IF THE PCI WERE TO ACHIEVE RESPECTABILITY, THEIR VICTORY WOULD BE INEVITABLE." (STATE 189185). WE THEREFORE CONCLUDE THAT, FROM THE POINT OF VIEW OF THEIR IMPACT IN ITALY, WE MUST RECOMMEND AGAINST WAIVERS FOR PCI OFFICIALS. VISA DENIALS WOULD LEAD TO SOME PRESS CRITICISM BUT, IN THE SHORT RUN, THAT CRITICISM

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WOULD BE LESS HARMFUL TO THE US AND THE CAUSE OF DEMOCRACY IN ITALY THAN WOULD PCI EXPLOITATION OF THE ISSUANCE OF VISAS AS AN ALLEGED INDICATION OF USG ACCEPTANCE OF THE PCI'S DEMOCRATIC CREDENTIALS.

5. THAT SAID, THE EMBASSY RECOGNIZES THAT THERE ARE CONSIDERATIONS, OTHER THAN THE IMPERATIVES OF ITALIAN DEMOCRATIC POLITICS, THAT WILL MAKE IT DIFFICULT TO REFUSE THE ISSUANCE OF VISAS

TO SENIOR PCI OFFICIALS. THE DEPARTMENT IS OBVIOUSLY IN A BETTER POSITION TO EVALUATE THOSE CONSIDERATIONS THAN IS THE EMBASSY. SHOULD THE DECISION ULTIMATELY BE TO GRANT WAIVERS AND VISAS TO PCI OFFICIALS, WE WOULD THEN URGE THAT THE MOST CAREFUL CONSIDERATION BE GIVEN TO THE MANNER IN WHICH SUCH A DECISION IS MADE PUBLIC. WE CAN BE CERTAIN THAT THE COMMUNIST AND LEFTIST PRESS WILL NOT ACCEPT IT AS ROUTINE DEVELOPMENT, BUT WILL INTERPRET IT AS A CLEAR CONFIRMATION OF THE CHANGE IN USG POLICY TOWARD THE PCI THAT THEY HAVE BEEN PREDICTING AS AN INEVITABLE RESULT OF THE JUNE 15 ELECTIONS. THUS, TO MINIMIZE THE IMPACT IN ITALY, WE WOULD HOPE THAT SOME WAY COULD BE FOUND TO PUT ANY CHANGE IN OUR VISA POLICY IN A GLOBAL CONTEXT. FOR EXAMPLE, WOULD IT BE POSSIBLE TO ANNOUNCE A CHANGE IN ATTITUDE TO VISAS FOR ALL EUROPEAN COMMUNISTS AS AN EXAMPLE OF OUR COMMITMENT TO CARRY OUT THE SPIRIT OF CSCE, BASED OF COURSE ON AN ASSUMPTION OF RECIPROCITY BY COMMUNIST-CONTROLLED GOVERNMENTS IN EUROPE? ALTERNATIVELY, WOULD IT BE POSSIBLE TO DIFFERENTIATE BETWEEN LEVELS OF SENIORITY WITHIN THE COMMUNIST PARTY STRUCTURES, E.G., ESTABLISHING A CUT-OFF FOR WAIVERS TO ELIMINATE VISAS FOR ALL OFFICIALS OF A NATIONAL PARTY OR ALL MEMBERS OF A CENTRAL COMMITTEE (177 MEMBERS IN ITALY OF WHOM SEGRE IS ONE) OR ONLY THOSE HIGHER-RANKING THAN THE CENTRAL COMMITTEE (I.E., IN ITALY THE DIRECTORATE, 33 MEMBERS, AND THE SECRETARIATE, 11 MEMBERS, OF WHICH NAPOLITANO IS ONE)? WHETHER THESE OR SOME OTHER FORMULA IS USED, IT WOULD OBVIOUSLY BE OF GREAT IMPORTANCE, FROM OUR POINT OF VIEW, THAT THE FIRST ISSUANCE OF VISAS TO SENIOR PCI OFFICIALS BE ACCOMPANIED BY A PUBLIC STATEMENT TO THE EFFECT THAT USG ATTITUDE TOWARD THE PCI HAS NOT CHANGED AND THAT PCI OFFICIALS WILL NOT BE RECEIVED BY USG OFFICIALS. VOLPE

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